

television stations and the newspapers to view the massacre, that the Hancock building managers agreed to snuff the lights. "It was only the glare of publicity that forced them to comply," said Beecher.

Chicago in the 1990s still has dozens of death trap buildings in which lights are inconsistently dimmed during migration periods. Many building managements pay lip service when contacted about bird migration hazards, but don't actually turn off the source of the problem.

One of the worst is the building at 311 S. Wacker. Birders commonly call the edifice the "Wedding Cake Building" because of the multi-tiered, exceedingly bright, decorative light structure on top of the building, clearly visible for miles. Building management has even boasted in its newsletter for tenants of its cooperation in saving birds by turning the lights off after 10 p.m. during spring and fall migration. But the garish lights have been commonly observed to remain on all night, all year. Even compliance with a 10 p.m. blackout may not be effective to save numbers of migrants, since research has long shown that most birds begin to fly in earnest at dusk and make their most concentrated flights early in the evening (Stokes 1985).

Local birder Al Welby has been watching this "Wedding Cake" building for years. Since he works nearby, Welby checks the base of the building most mornings during migration as well as nearby dumpsters. "The maintenance staff tends to get out there real early to sweep up the casualties off the sidewalk," he said. "They just throw them in the garbage. Those same janitors are the ones who tell me the real slaughter is up at the top of the building at the lighted Wedding Cake."

Bird deaths in urban settings aren't restricted by any means to lighted skyscrapers at night. A body of research is growing nationwide on

the effects of other light sources on bird navigation, with many researchers concluding that flashing lights, such as those found on television transmission towers and lighthouses, particularly red lights, are most likely to distract birds from their migratory paths on overcast nights.

Vernon Kleen, of the Illinois Department of Conservation, noted that in Springfield, of two television transmission towers located about one-half mile apart, most bird deaths are recorded at the tower with red flashing lights, rather than the tower with white strobe lights. "It's not clear whether the birds are just hitting the guy wires and the towers or whether they are also so entranced by the lights that they just circle and circle the tower until they fall to the ground, exhausted," said Kleen.

Large and small buildings alike pose problems for birds because of reflective windows or glassed courtyards filled with vegetation.

Al Welby sees frequent bird collisions and mortality during the day at the Wedding Cake building. Not only does the building boast a killer

light structure at night, but it also poses hazards to birds which use a grassy courtyard at the building to feed during the day. An indoor winter garden, a greenhouse restaurant, is filled with vegetation and Welby said birds frequently fly straight into the glass, aiming for trees they see inside the building. "The birds fly straight into the plate glass as fast as if they were making a dash for an outdoor tree. I see a lot of broken wings and bills and have to move a lot of birds to safety or just throw them away," said Welby.

The Hancock building, which is doing a reasonable job of dimming its nighttime lights, is surrounded by a number of small locust trees. Local birder Bob Hughes collected a large number of dead birds for the Field Museum during the fall migration of 1993 at the base of the Hancock, with 20 species of warblers including Mourning, Connecticut, Northern Parula, Cape May, and Black-throated Blue Warblers. Ovenbirds are the most numerous casualty.

Hughes' impression is that "the birds can see the building at night.

Helping injured birds

What should be done with an injured bird? Federal law prohibits attempts to treat the bird, except by licensed rehabilitators. Intent is important in the eyes of the federal authorities. Experts say a private citizen who is transporting a live bird to a rehabilitation center or a dead bird to a museum for its specimen collection, will not encounter legal tangles.

Willowbrook Wildlife Haven, the rehabilitation center run by the DuPage County Forest Preserve District, and the Trailside Museum in River Forest accept injured birds and operate referral services.

Willowbrook tries to get all injured birds back into the wild, said Rich Adams, the Haven's wildlife specialist. But about 50 percent of the injured birds received die within 24 hours of their accident. Of those that survive, window collision victims tend to sustain such severe neurological damage that they cannot be released into the wild and remain on permanent display at the center for educational purposes. About 61 percent of injured birds which survive the first day are eventually released back to the wild.

- Christine Philip